

## Referral Guidelines for Infants and Toddlers

1. The purpose of the dental screening of asymptomatic infants and toddlers is to classify them as likely or unlikely to have dental disease. Those who you believe are likely to have disease should be referred to a dentist for a definitive diagnosis and treatment as needed.

*NOTE: Our pilot work for the “Into the Mouths of Babes” project indicates that screening for oral problems by medical professionals, particularly tooth decay, is useful in determining if a dental referral is needed. About three-quarters of patients screened by physicians and designated as needing a referral were determined on referral to a dentist to have tooth decay. Tooth decay was found to be about 15 times more likely in screened patients who were positive than in those who were not (the positive likelihood ratio). The post-screening odds of tooth decay as determined by a dentist are about 60 percent.*

2. Patients should be referred if you detect anything that is not normal, even if you are unsure.
3. Always refer for:
  - Dental caries (tooth decay) at any stage
  - Soft tissue pathology, such as dental abscesses or other infection
  - Pain
4. You might decide to refer a particular patient after your risk assessment because you determine the child to be at very high risk for dental problems from conditions such as extremely poor oral hygiene, defective enamel, frequent intake of sugared medications, or special health care needs.
5. Helpful hints:
  - Compile a list of Medicaid dental providers in your area who will treat very young children. Pediatric dentists are most likely to provide this treatment, but they are in short supply in the state.
  - For those patients who need to be seen immediately, such as those who have infection or severe decay, have someone from your office help the family member make the dental appointment. Caregivers for children with less severe conditions should be informed of your findings and that they should make a dental appointment as soon as possible.
  - Follow-up with the caregiver at the child’s next visit to your office to determine if a dental visit has taken place.